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960	Title 2008 Spring Ring-necked Pheasant Crowing Count Survey	07/14/08

Abstract: Along the four annual survey routes of Indiana's ring-necked pheasant crowing count conducted in Newton and Benton Counties, the number of roosters heard per stop did not significantly change between the spring of 2007 and the spring of 2008. An average of 0.95 crowing pheasants were heard per stop during the 2008 survey while an average of 0.89 roosters was heard/stop in 2006. Also insignificant, the 2008 count average of 0.95 was only 22% lower than the 10-year average of 1.22 roosters/stop. However, the 2008 count was significantly lower, by 69%, than the long-term average of 3.02 roosters/stop ($P=0.0005$).

Work Plan #: 300FW0BIRD07516

The colorful ring-necked pheasant is a well-known game bird of Indiana and the Midwest. This naturalized, yet embraced species was introduced from Asia to California in 1857, and Indiana became involved in stocking ring-necked pheasants around 1900. After finding a niche in the agricultural land of Northern and Central Indiana, the ring-necked pheasant has remained a sought after upland game species by Hoosier hunters. As with many other Indiana species, annual research is conducted on the ring-necked pheasant. The information that is gathered from this research is used to set forth management priorities and harvest regulations in coming years.

Methods

Since 1976, The Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife has conducted an annual ring-necked pheasant crowing count to determine a spring male population index. The annual survey is conducted on four road routes in Benton and Newton counties. Every five years, eleven additional road routes are surveyed for crowing pheasants, and have been surveyed periodically since 1976. The 2008 annual survey routes were completed between 30 April and 9 May. Observers recorded the number of roosters (male pheasants) heard during a 2-minute period at 20 stops spaced at 1-mile intervals along each route.

Counts were started 30 minutes before sunrise and were not conducted during inclement weather.

Results

In 2008, a total of 74 roosters were heard at 79 stops (0.95 roosters/stop) along the four annual survey routes. The 2008 count was greater than (+6%) the 0.89 roosters per stop on the 2007 count, but the difference was not significant ($P=0.328$). Also, the 0.95 roosters/stop in 2008 was not significantly lower (-22%) than the 10-year average of 1.22 roosters per stop ($P=0.185$). The only comparison that showed a significant difference was between the 2008 count and the long-term average ($P=0.0005$). The 2008 count was 69% lower than the long-term (+30 years) average of 3.02 roosters per stop.

Discussion

The substantial long-term decline in Indiana's ring-necked pheasant population is primarily due to the loss of suitable habitat for nesting and raising young. Currently, little more than 295,500 acres of farmland are idle across the state through the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). This equates to more than a 90% loss of potential game bird habitat when compared to the



late 1960's and early 1970's. Because much of this habitat has been swallowed up by urban and suburban development, Indiana's pheasant population will likely never again resemble the number of birds that existed during the "glory days" of 40 years ago. This huge loss of habitat has also devastated Indiana's quail and rabbit populations.

However, Indiana landowners can take advantage of some federal programs including the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program (CCRP) administered by the USDA Farm Service Agency. There are 3 CCRP practices in particular that are available to Indiana landowners and can create a noticeable benefit for Indiana's upland game: 1) CP-21 – filter strips, 2) CP-33 – upland wildlife buffers, and 3) CP38 – State Acres for Wildlife Enhancement (SAFE). These conservation practices provide essential nesting cover for pheasants and other game birds while lessening erosion and improving water quality. For more information about these and other federal programs, contact your local USDA service center.

The Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife also has programs that can provide landowners with support and funds to establish and/or maintain game bird habitat. These programs include the Wildlife Habitat Cost-Share Program, the Game Bird Habitat Development Program, and in designated pheasant priority areas, the Pheasant Habitat Incentive Program. For additional information about these IDFW programs, contact your local district biologist or visit: <http://www.in.gov/dnr/fishwild/>

One simple tip landowners can use to substantially improve conditions for upland game on their land is to simply wait as long as possible to mow waterways and ditch banks (preferably after mid-August). This will provide safe cover for hen pheasants to nest and raise their young.

Acknowledgements

The Indiana Division of Fish and Wildlife would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following people to the 2008 pheasant crowing count survey: B. Porch, G. Rainford, and D. Spitznagle. Thank You.

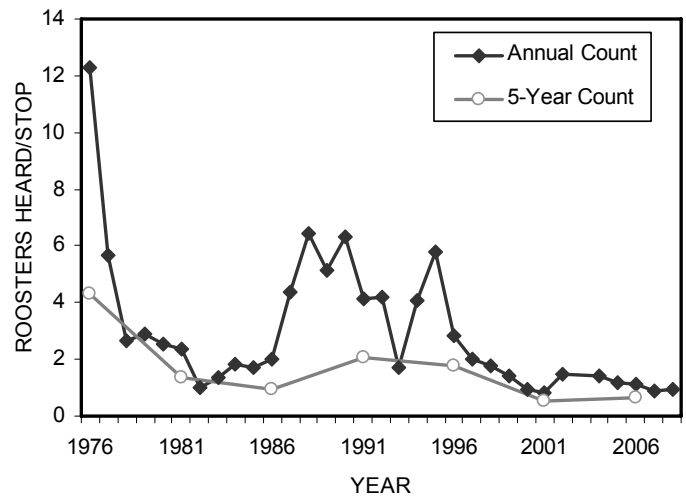


Figure 1. The average number of ring-necked pheasants heard crowing at each stop along 4 routes of the annual pheasant crowing count surveyed in Newton and Benton County (black line) between 1976-2008 and along 15 routes of an expanded count (gray line) located throughout Indiana's pheasant range and conducted every 5 years between 1976-2006.